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SUBJECT: NAS PANAMA MONTHLY REPORT AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS: FEBRUARY 2007

REF: A) Panama 299

B) Panama 218
C) 06 Panama 2419

¶1. (U) This cable provides a brief overview of NAS/Panama activities and major law enforcement and counternarcotics developments during the month of February, 2007.

Meeting with Attorney General

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador, accompanied by NAS and DEA directors, met with Attorney General Ana Matilde Gomez in early February to discuss the Technical Judicial Police (PTJ) (Refs B and C). Gomez stated that she and the Executive were in full agreement regarding the PTJ, namely keeping the institution largely intact and firmly under her direction. However, at present, we understand high-level jockeying continues regarding the organization and mandate of the PTJ. It is possible the institution will be divided, with some areas moved to the National Police (PNP). We continue to discretely advocate keeping the PTJ largely intact and firmly under the direction of the AG, rather than the PNP.

PTJ Internal Developments

¶3. (SBU) NAS Director met with interim PTJ director Gustavo Barragan to discuss the direction and potential reorganization of the institution as well as ongoing programs. With the exception of some hiccups over providing namechecks to Embassy offices, the PTJ has been working well with the Embassy under Barragan's leadership. While Barragan expressed a desire to be named the new director of the entity, he appears not to be under consideration by AG Gomez. Meanwhile, the 90-day forced leave of formal PTJ head Jaime Jacome ends on March 19, and Jacome tells us he plans to return to office. It remains to be seen, however, if AG Gomez will be able to prevent Jacome's return through some sort of administrative or legal maneuver.

Maritime Service Leadership Change

¶4. (SBU) National Maritime Service (SMN) head Ricardo Traad tendered his resignation but was subsequently asked to stay on for a short period by President Torrijos. Our best information indicates that Ricardo Cigarruista of the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) has been selected as the next SMN head. The delay in formally naming a new director might relate to the pending public announcement of the GOP plan to merge the SMN and the National Air Service (SAN) into a unified coast guard (Ref A).

Re-establishing CNIES

15. (SBU) NAS Director met with Vice Minister Severino Mejia of the Ministry of Government and Justice (MOGJ) to press for a GOP response to our mid-January diplomatic note regarding desired reestablishment of the suspended DOD Counternarcotics Information Exchange System (CNIES) feed. Mejia and Foreign Ministry legal director Iana Quadri verbally accepted the legal language in our diplomatic note and promised a written response. NAS and ECON also met with Eustacio Fabrega, head of the Civil Aviation Authority, to prepare the groundwork for an updated Notice to Airmen (NOTAM), once the GOP sends its formal answer to our diplomatic note.

Follow-Up to MOGJ Colombia Visit

16. (SBU) NAS and ODC also met with Mejia to discuss follow-up to his recent USG-funded visit to Colombia. We were pleased to hear of a GOP commitment to training programs with Colombian police and military. (We note that two members of the PNP border division are currently participating in the USG-funded "Jungla" commando course in Colombia.) However, Mejia indicated that proposals beyond training with require inter-agency discussion as well as vetting at the annual Panama-Colombia binational border issues meeting (Combifron), to be held mid year.

Police Training Taking Hold

17. (U) We have seen numerous signs that NAS-funded police modernization training for the PNP is being to take hold. One key change involves institutionalization of the concepts being taught in our ongoing "Police Executive Leadership Seminar Series (PELSS).

For the first time in a decade, the PNP has retooled both its mission and vision statements. Second, and for the first time since its founding in 1990, the PNP is compiling a procedural manual for officers from top to bottom. The PNP has also taken a hard look at improving morale in the lower ranks. Lastly, the PNP is institutionalizing the problem-oriented policing concept by creating a training module for all subordinate officers from the rank of agent (agente) to major (mayor).

National Police Donation Ceremony

18. (U) The Ambassador presided over a well-publicized donation ceremony for two Donzi go-fast boats and four HUMVEE ambulances for the border division of the PNP. The Ambassador emphasized the dual purpose of the HUMVEES, which will provide medical transport capability for both PNP members and local residents. MOGJ Minister Olga Golcher lauded the U.S.-Panama bilateral law enforcement relationship. NAS Director discussed reductions in U.S. assistance to Panama with press on the margins of the ceremony.

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